

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A11

NEW YORK TIMES
26 June 1985

U.S. to Replace Many Embassies And Consulates for Better Security

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 25 — The State Department has decided to renovate or replace almost half of its 263 embassies and consulates around the world because the existing buildings are vulnerable to espionage or terrorist attack, department officials said today.

In what would be the most ambitious building and security program in the department's history, over the next seven years 75 embassies and consulates worldwide will be abandoned and then rebuilt at new locations, according to Robert E. Lamb, Assistant Secretary of State for Administration.

Another 50 will be substantially renovated or rebuilt on site. In addition, 210 foreign offices of the United States Information Agency, Foreign Commercial Services and the Agency for International Development will be renovated or replaced, too. The cost of all this work, Mr. Lamb said, will be at least \$3.5 billion.

State Department officials would not identify the embassies and consulates involved because they did not want to tell terrorists which were vulnerable, an official said.

Eight-Member Panel

The building program and other measures are in response to recommendations from a special State Department Advisory Panel on Overseas Security, whose report was issued today.

The eight-member group, appointed by Secretary of State George P. Shultz last July and headed by Adm. Bobby R. Inman, former Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, was highly critical of the State Department's foreign security programs.

The report said security programs overseas were disorganized and confused, adding that security offices were "grossly understaffed" and poorly trained.

Foreign nationals hired as guards at some posts around the world were illiterate or incompetent, the panel found, and the responsibility for embassy security was divided among so many different people and offices that different security "survey teams visiting posts abroad often make contradictory recommendations," the report said.

Endorsement of Findings

Mr. Lamb said Secretary of State George P. Shultz had endorsed the panel's findings in principle, and he "asked that we proceed quickly to implement the recommendations."

Among the other panel members were Lawrence S. Eagleburger, former Under Secretary of State, and Anne L. Armstrong, former Ambassador to Great Britain and now chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

Mr. Lamb said the group's findings surprised the State Department. "We knew we had a problem," he said, "but we didn't expect it to be of this magnitude."

Although officials would not identify the 126 embassies and consulates to be renovated or replaced, Mr. Lamb said most of them "are former residences or offices that we have been putting layer after layer of security on" over the last few years.

Many of them are so close to the street that they cannot be effectively protected against vehicle bombs, he said. The car bombings of two embassies in Lebanon and one in Kuwait over the last two years, killing almost 100 people overall, were the major impetus for the report and the rebuilding program.

Other embassies and consulates, including almost every one in Soviet bloc countries, adjoin other buildings, making it difficult to protect them from electronic listening devices, officials said. Mr. Lamb said a principal reason for the new building program was that, "We are facing a very serious espionage threat from electronic and other means."

Mr. Lamb said the department has not decided how it will pay for the building program, although he said the \$3.5 billion expense will be spread over at least five budget years. All the new embassies should be complete in about eight years, he said.

The panel also recommended that the State Department convene a formal board of inquiry "with the powers of establishing accountability in all cases involving terrorism or security-related attacks." Members of Congress and others have criticized the State Department for failing to assign responsibility following past terrorist attacks that appeared to be the result of inadequate security.

Mr. Shultz has accepted that recommendation, the report said. Mr. Lamb said the purpose of the boards of inquiry would "not be to find someone to punish," although he added that "it may very well be that people will be fired" or disciplined as a result of any future board of inquiry investigations.

Mr. Lamb said he will leave his present job next week to begin putting the report's more than 80 recommendations into effect. Other suggestions deal with staffing, bureaucratic organization, training of personnel and intelligence matters, among others.